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## **Shuster Urges the VA to Reject Decision to Ban Flag Folding Ceremony from National Veterans Cemetery Burials**

*Washington, D.C.* – **Congressman Bill Shuster** has signed onto a letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs objecting to the decision by the National Cemetery Administration to ban the recitation of the common flag folding ceremony at the nation's 125 national veterans cemeteries.

“What kind of message does this decision send to our veterans and their families right before Veterans Day?” Shuster asked. “This is nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction to political correctness,” Shuster said.

“The flag folding ceremony is a time honored tradition to honor our deceased veterans. It should not be banned because one person objected to it.”

During burials, cemetery employees as well as volunteers from groups such as the American Legion or the Veterans from Foreign Wars may execute the flag folding ceremony which consists of folding the American flag 13 times. The significance of each fold is recited as the ceremony progresses.

According to a report in the *Military Times*, one complaint was registered concerning the 11<sup>th</sup> fold, which honors Jewish war veterans by glorifying the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” That one complaint resulted in the total ban of the flag folding ceremony from all national veterans cemeteries.

“I am also concerned that the Department of Veterans Affairs would allow a decision that would directly affect the ability of veterans service organizations to carry out their mission of assisting veterans and their families,” Shuster added. “If a family wants the ceremony, they should have the ceremony.”

Shuster's letter argues that the flag folding ceremony does not interfere with the separation of church and state. He and his colleagues who signed the letter request that the Department of Veterans Affairs reinstate their policy to allow the ceremony to continue.

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